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FOR DISCUSSION ONLY

A POSITION PAPER  
ON  
SCHOOL LIBRARIES  
IN ALBERTA

This paper was prepared by an inter-branch committee  
of Alberta Education, under the auspices of the  
Curriculum Branch.

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## INTRODUCTION

Subsequent to discussions with a number of concerned individuals and groups, including the Learning Resources Council of the A.T.A., regarding the status of school libraries in Alberta, the Minister of Education, Honourable David King, directed that a departmental committee be struck to prepare a position paper which would:

1. Identify the major problems and issues affecting school libraries.
2. Identify the alternatives for the resolution of these issues.
3. Advance a position with respect to these alternatives.
4. Describe the major characteristics and services of an effective school library.

The Minister further directed that this position paper be distributed to the major stakeholder groups for education in Alberta as a means of ascertaining public and professional reactions and recommendations for refinement and change.

It should be emphasized that the opinions expressed are those of the Departmental Committee.<sup>1</sup> The positions taken do not necessarily represent the official views of Alberta Education. It is expected that response to this paper will serve as a basis for clarifying needs and for the development of policy recommendations relative to the provision of school library services to Alberta students.

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<sup>1</sup> Committee views are based on a review of the literature (see Appendix) and an analysis of policies of other Ministries of Education in Canada, as well as the individual experiences and perspectives of Committee members.

## I. PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

There is considerable evidence to suggest that there is a wide disparity in both the quantity and quality of school library services available to students throughout the various school jurisdictions in the province. Moreover, it would appear that continuing pressures for fiscal constraint have served to prevent the development and maintenance of satisfactory standards for library services in some schools and jurisdictions.

Specific problems that are believed to be most serious in detracting from the satisfactory functioning of school libraries may be summarized as follows:

1. Lack of clear identification of the role of the school library in the overall instructional program of the school.
2. A lack of clear-cut policy direction with respect to the development of school libraries.
3. A lack of officially approved standards or guidelines related to the provision of library services to students and teachers.
4. A lack of professional assistance and direction at the district and/or school level to develop effective library services.
5. A lack of funds to support the level of library services required.

From this set of problem areas, a corresponding set of issues can be derived. These "issues", as delineated below, provide the basis for the organization of this position paper:

ISSUE ONE - What should be the role of the school library in the overall instructional program of the school?

ISSUE TWO - Whose responsibility is it to develop policy direction for school libraries, and what kinds of policies are needed?

ISSUE THREE - Who should establish standards and guidelines for the operation of school libraries, and should these be expressed in quantitative or qualitative terms?

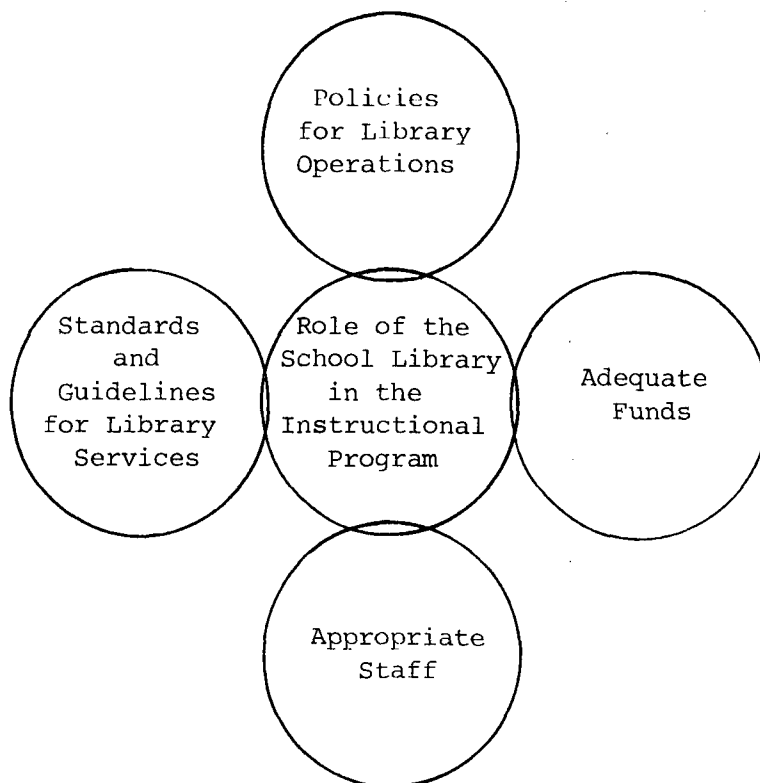


ISSUE FOUR - Is professional direction at the school and/or district level a critical component of an effective library program?

ISSUE FIVE - Is there a real shortage of funding to support effective library services?

The relationship between each of these issues and the overall problem of inadequate provision of library services in some schools and districts may be illustrated diagrammatically. In the diagram below, the central position of the "Role of the School Library" serves to illustrate that this particular issue is basic, and that other issues can only be resolved subsequent to satisfactory resolution of it.

INTERRELATIONSHIPS OF MAJOR ISSUES  
FACING SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN ALBERTA



## II. ALTERNATIVES AND POSITION STATEMENTS ON THE ISSUES

There are alternative points of view with respect to the resolution of the key issues that are thought to face school libraries in Alberta at this time. In this section, the major alternatives for each issue are identified, and the preferred position of the Departmental Committee is expressed and substantiated with a supporting rationale.

### ISSUE ONE

What should be the role of the school library  
in the overall instructional program of the school?

#### Alternatives:

1. The primary role of the school library should be to provide those services, facilities, and materials that will promote intellectual curiosity and a desire for lifelong learning; a love of literature, books and leisure reading; and the opportunity to use a variety of information sources to pursue individual needs and interests.
2. The primary role of the school library should be to provide services, facilities, and materials that are fully integrated with the instructional program of the school. A fully integrated role implies that the library media collection is selected specifically to meet curriculum requirements; that the services provided are those designed to facilitate curriculum implementation; and that teachers and library staff work in close partnership to share responsibility for student achievement of curriculum goals and objectives.
3. The role of the school library should be to attend to both #1 and #2 above.

Committee Position: It is the position of the committee that the primary role of the school library should be one which is fully integrated with the instructional program of the school, as outlined in alternative #2.

#### Rationale:

In the term, "school library", the word "school" should have special significance. It is not enough to provide students with a good, organized collection of media resources and make these available in the context of a public library. Rather, in a fully integrated library program, the school's curriculum and the individual needs of students and teachers become the central factors in decision-making. The evaluation and selection of media, the determination of library services, and the appropriate

utilization of media are all based upon the achievement of curriculum goals and objectives. Teachers and the school librarian plan all aspects of the library program on a cooperative basis so that the library serves as an extension of the classroom.

Further, in a society which is moving rapidly into the information era, it is essential that schools give high priority to instruction in, and application of, skills in information processing and communications. All students should be able to locate, organize, analyze, interpret, evaluate and apply information from a variety of print, non-print and electronic data sources. The school library has an important part to play in the development and mastery of these basic learning skills, and there is considerable research evidence which points to significant improvement in skill development and media use when the library program is effectively integrated with the school's instructional program.

#### SPECIAL NOTE:

In some instances, the school library must also serve the needs of the entire community. This additional responsibility may impact on the nature of the media collection and the range of services, but it should not be allowed to interfere with the primary responsibility of integration with the instructional program.

#### ISSUE TWO

Whose responsibility is it to develop  
policy direction for school libraries, and  
what kinds of policies are needed?

#### Alternatives:

1. Policy directions should be developed by Alberta Education.
2. Policy directions should be developed by School Boards.
3. Policy directions should be developed by individual schools.
4. Policy directions should be developed by all levels of educational governance - Alberta Education, School Boards and schools.

Committee Position: It is the position of the committee that all levels of educational governance should be involved in policy development in matters effecting school libraries (alternative #4).

## Rationale:

A shared responsibility for development of policy in matters affecting school libraries is consistent with the approach to policy-making that is already in place for program development, program delivery and the operation and administration of schools in Alberta.

It seems necessary to develop and apply a similar approach to policy-making in the case of school libraries if the school library program is to be integrated with the instructional program of the school and if school libraries are to play a fully functional role in the operation of schools.

The responsibilities of Alberta Education should include policy directions related to:

1. The role of the school library in the achievement of Goals of Schooling, Goals of Education and requirements of the Program of Studies.
2. The development, improvement and evaluation of school library programs.
3. The operations of provincial curriculum committees in ensuring that the role of the school library in the achievement of curriculum goals and objectives is outlined appropriately in curriculum guides.
4. The provincial coordination of standardized procedures or programs to improve the efficiency or effectiveness of school library services, (e.g., centralized cataloguing, computer networks, etc.).
5. Linkages with other departments of government (e.g., Alberta Culture, Alberta Advanced Education).

The responsibilities of local School Boards should include policy directions related to the operation and management of school library programs under their jurisdiction. These might include the following:

1. The establishment of Board policies for the school library program.
2. Acceptable procedures for the evaluation and selection of media resources for school libraries in the district.
3. Criteria for the selection and placement of school library staff.
4. The allocation of funds to support the school library program.



5. The evaluation of district and school library services to ensure that such services are achieving intended goals.
6. Cooperative agreements with community and other agencies for additional services to students.

The responsibility of the school (principal, library and teaching staff) should include policy directions related to:

1. The establishment of school goals and objectives for the library program to reflect the unique needs of the students, the community, and the instructional programs.
2. The relative responsibilities of administration, teachers and library staff in planning the integration of the library program with the school's instructional program.
3. The establishment of criteria for determining school priorities for media selection and for the provision of library services to students.
4. The establishment of operational guidelines and procedures for the utilization of the library.
5. The establishment of evaluation procedures to measure the achievement of library goals and objectives.

### ISSUE THREE

Who should establish standards and guidelines for the operation of school libraries, and should these be expressed in quantitative or qualitative terms?

#### Alternatives:

This issue will be dealt with in two stages:

1. The level of educational governance at which standards and guidelines would most appropriately be established (Province, Board, School, or some combination thereof).
2. The respective merits of quantitative and qualitative standards and guidelines.

Committee Position: With respect to #1 above, it is the committee's position that standards and guidelines for the operation of school libraries should be a shared responsibility involving Alberta Education, Boards and Schools. With respect to #2 above, the committee's position is that qualitative standards and guidelines are the most appropriate vehicle for encouraging high quality library services in Alberta schools.

## Rationale

### 1. Level of governance in the development of standards and guidelines.

A shared approach to the development of standards and guidelines for school library services is consistent with the approach to standards and guidelines that is taken in the related areas of program development, program delivery and the operation and administration of schools in Alberta.

It should be the responsibility of Alberta Education to establish quality standards and guidelines with respect to:

1. The qualifications of personnel charged with the responsibility for developing and maintaining the school library program.
2. Building guidelines for school library facilities.
3. The evaluation of media materials dealing with controversial issues, bias, prejudice, etc.
4. The development of the school library collection to support the Provincial Program of Studies.
5. The types of library services which should be provided to students.
6. Recognized standards of materials cataloguing.
7. General criteria for evaluation of library services.

It should be the responsibility of school jurisdictions to establish quality standards or guidelines with respect to:

1. Expected quality of the media collection and services beyond the established provincial guidelines.
2. The evaluation and selection of media for school libraries.
3. The services that should be provided to support locally-developed curriculum.
4. The determination of annual budgets to support the desired service.
5. The renovation and/or upgrading of existing school libraries to reflect current needs.
6. Criteria for the evaluation of school system and school library services.

Individual schools should assume responsibility for establishing quality standards and guidelines regarding:

1. The assignment of professional and support staff required to provide the desired service.
2. The delegation of staff responsibilities in terms of the nature of the library program and services required.
3. The cooperation of classroom teachers and library staff in planning the integration of the library program and the instruction of students in required library skills.
4. The supervision of students in the library.
5. The expenditure of budgeted funds for the library.
6. Hours of library operation.
7. Evaluation of library services in the school.
8. The use of student assistants or other volunteer help in the library.

2. Quantitative vs. Qualitative Standards and Guidelines.

Quantitative guidelines are a means of expressing quality expectations using numerical ratios, e.g., \$20.00/student for media acquisition; 1 - 16mm projector per 10 teachers, etc.

Qualitative guidelines are a means of expressing quality by relating intended outcomes to the program needs of the school or students, e.g., the media collection will permit students to research information in a variety of print and non-print formats; students will receive specific instruction in the effective use of periodical collection, etc.

Since there will be significant differences between the instructional programs of schools, there will also be differences in the library services and media required to support specific instructional programs. Quantitative standards, because of their precision and exactness, cannot acknowledge these differences effectively. In addition, there is no empirical evidence that demonstrates conclusive relationships between a given quantitative standard and achievement of curriculum objectives. As an illustration, is 2 filmstrips/student an adequate amount, or should it be some other ratio? The view of the committee is that, rather than stating requirements in ratio form, the number of filmstrips in the school library would be more appropriately derived from perceived local needs, utilization patterns, and the availability of relevant filmstrips. This would vary from year to year, and from subject area to subject area.

#### ISSUE FOUR

Is professional direction at the school and/or district level a critical component of an effective library program?

#### Alternatives:

1. Professional direction is critical in the implementation of an effective library program.
2. Professional direction is not critical in the implementation of an effective library program.

Committee Position: It is the position of the committee that professional direction is a critical component of an effective library program (alternative #1).

#### Rationale:

The committee acknowledges that it is not economically feasible to provide the services of a full-time teacher/librarian in schools with small enrolments. The committee also acknowledges that the placement of a teacher/librarian in a school library is not a guarantee of an effective library program. However, it is difficult to see how full integration of the library program with the instructional program of the school can occur without on-going professional decision-making. Where a school staff is sufficiently dedicated, sufficiently knowledgeable about library planning and media utilization, and willing to devote considerable extra time and energy, it may be possible to provide an adequate level of library service for a short period of time without the availability of professional librarian services. However, the demands on teaching staff would seem to be too high to ensure long-term success of this approach.

There are alternatives, however. A qualified teacher/librarian could be employed on a part-time basis, or assigned on a full-time basis to serve more than one small school. A school system librarian could provide professional direction to teachers and support staff in small schools. Even for these alternatives, it must be emphasized that the lack of a full-time, qualified teacher/librarian places additional burdens of responsibility on the principal and staff to provide for full integration of the library program.

As a basic minimum requirement, the services of a teacher/librarian, in one manner or another, should be considered for all schools. This person should have the following qualifications:

1. A knowledge of the school's educational program and the ability to translate this knowledge into appropriate plans for organizing the facilities, media, services and staff of the school library to serve the needs of the school.
2. A knowledge of media evaluation strategies and the ability to work with teachers to determine the media needs and priorities of the school's instructional program.
3. An ability to motivate students toward the continuous use of school library services, facilities and materials.
4. A knowledge of the potential advantages and disadvantages of each of the various media formats as related to learning objectives and teaching and learning styles.
5. The ability to work with teachers on a collegial and team-teaching basis to plan and prepare student activities and to locate and plan the use of appropriate instructional materials.
6. A knowledge of accepted library practices and the ability to apply this knowledge in a school setting.
7. The ability to provide formal and informal instruction to students to improve their library and communication skills.
8. The ability to measure and assess the achievement of the goals and objectives of the library program and make realistic recommendations for improvement.

The qualifications suggested above will typically be found in persons who have received professional education in both education and library science, and who have demonstrated success as classroom teachers. It cannot be expected that support and technical staff will be able to provide the type of professional service that comes from this combination of professional training and experience.

## ISSUE FIVE

Is there a real shortage of funding  
to support effective library services?

### Alternatives:

1. There is a shortage of funding to support effective library services.
2. There is not a shortage of funding to support effective library services.

Committee Position: The position of the committee is that the issue of library funding is no different from the issue of funding as it applies to other aspects of program delivery. That is, actual expenditures to support specific programs will vary in accordance with the perceived priority of the program at the various levels of educational governance. It is the committee's position that there is not a shortage of funding to support effective library services (alternative #2).

### Rationale:

School financing is a complex matter with a great number of variables. While generalizations are difficult and sometimes misleading, it is the committee's position that there is no greater "real" shortage of funding to support effective library services than for any other function of schooling.

Regional Offices of Education, in their evaluation of school programs, have found exemplary library programs in both rural and urban school jurisdictions. The fact that these jurisdictions have developed effective library programs within existing provincial funding formulas further suggests that there is no pervasive or uniform shortage of funds to support library services. What has been lacking is a rationale and clear set of policy guidelines and standards that would encourage districts and schools to direct a fair proportion of available funds toward the provision of an adequate level of library services.

In particular, what has been missing is a clear articulation of the library with the instructional program. This shortfall is evident in the absence of policies, standards and guidelines at the provincial level, and, for most districts, at the Board and school level. It has been the prime cause of decisions of Boards and schools to direct their available funds toward programs where a comprehensive and consistent level of development has occurred. School libraries in Alberta have for the most part not been attributed such attention in recent years, and have consequently been overlooked as a priority for the expenditure of funds.



### III. CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LIBRARY PROGRAM

If the committee positions advocated throughout this paper are accepted, and implemented, the following characteristics and types of services should be observable in the operations of school libraries:

#### A. Characteristics:

1. School and district policies in relation to library services will reflect the unique characteristics of the instructional program of the district and the school.
2. The principal, teachers, and teacher/librarian will be active partners on an ongoing basis in planning and coordinating the instructional program with the library program.
3. The principal, teachers and teacher/librarian will participate in the identification of service, collection and facility priority needs so that budget projections can be justified on the basis of actual benefits to students.
4. The teacher/librarian will coordinate, in cooperation with the teaching staff, the evaluation and selection of new media and the plans for their utilization.
5. Formal and informal instruction will be provided to students to help them acquire the skills of library use, research and information processing.
6. Teachers will incorporate in their instructional program meaningful activities which require students to apply skills to locate and use media.
7. Students will demonstrate their ability to locate and use the materials in the school collection.
8. Teacher/librarians will ensure that facilities and collections are well organized and that the library environment is one which is stimulating and conducive to learning as well as to leisure pursuits.
9. Students will have access to and be encouraged to use the library on a regular basis. Operating hours will reflect student needs.
10. The school library will be perceived by students and staff as an important center for learning.

11. Both the quantity of media used and the quality of use will give evidence to the overall impact of the library program.
12. Students will demonstrate the ability to use a variety of media formats.
13. Library staff will demonstrate sensitivity to student needs and will provide assistance as required.
14. Students will demonstrate respect for staff and for the media and facilities made available to them.
15. Activities will be initiated to encourage students to use the school library for pleasure and enjoyment.

B. Types of Service:

1. The teacher/librarian will cooperate with teachers to correlate available media with teacher-prepared unit plans to develop utilization activities for students.
2. The teacher/librarian will provide assistance and instruction to students in the application of library skills.
3. The teacher/librarian will provide advice and assistance to teachers on media appropriateness and utilization strategies.
4. Library staff will acquire, catalog and organize media and equipment for convenient teacher and student use.
5. Library staff will provide or administer a media production/reproduction service in keeping with instructional program needs and priorities.
6. Library staff will regularly communicate new acquisitions to students and teachers.
7. The teacher/librarian will maintain liaison with other libraries in the community to arrange inter-library loans and student/teacher access to services and facilities.
8. The library staff will cooperate with teachers to prepare special displays, activity centers, etc., to support the instructional program and/or community, provincial and national projects in which the school intends to participate (e.g., Science Fair, Book Week(s), Safety Programs, Education Week).

9. The teacher/librarian will communicate to teachers information regarding the availability of media resources from school system, regional, provincial and national media centers and arrange for teacher loan as required.
10. The teacher/librarian will prepare and submit reports on library utilization and evaluation of the library program as a basis for future planning and development.
11. The teacher/librarian will manage the library program budget and provide financial statements as required.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This paper has taken the position that many students in Alberta schools are not receiving the quality of library services they need and deserve. While a number of reasons for this lack of service can be advanced, it is the Committee's view that a misconception regarding the role of the school library is the root cause. The Committee further believes that the primary role of the school library is one of total integration with the schools's instructional program and that such integration is possible without special increases in provincial funding.

The Committee wishes to emphasize that these positions represent a careful and sincere analysis of the problem based on a review of literature and an analysis of policies of other Ministries of Education in Canada. The Committee would appreciate your sincere and studied response to this paper. On the basis of your own experience and the perspective from which you view the problems, you may agree or disagree with the positions we have taken. We need your input so that an appropriate course of action can be recommended to the Minister of Education and other levels of educational governance in Alberta.

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